

**Abstract 316**

**TITLE:** "Addictphobia" A New Concept to Capture the Stigma and Ostracism of Drug Users  
And Limitations on HIV Prevention for Drug Users

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**ISSUE:** The following widely held negative stereotypes of drug users are false but continue to substantially influence public attitudes and acceptable public policy. Drug users are believed to be (1) criminals whose addiction represents a moral failing that should be punished rather than treated. (2) Unwilling or unable to change their risk behaviors and (3) unreliable participants in clinical trials and (4) unlikely to be able to adhere to complicated treatment regimens such as the highly active antiretroviral treatment for HIV infection or treatment of hepatitis C infection. These pervasive negative images and stigma extend to professionals and institutions that work with drug users (substance abuse treatment, risk reduction counselors). The inclination to punishment is illustrated by the substantial societal investment in prisons and criminal justice institutions and the relatively limited support for substance abuse treatment. These societal attitudes are also manifested in restrictions on syringe sales through laws and pharmacy regulations. These unsympathetic stances toward drug users have limited the options for public health programs for drug users particularly HIV prevention particularly among injection drug users.

**SETTING:** United States of America

**PROJECT:** A new concept "Addictphobia" is proposed to give a short, recognizable name to the complex of these stereotypes, stigmas and negative attitudes.

**RESULTS:** The concepts of "racism" and "homophobia" have helped identify important social and individual factors impinging on the success of prevention activities. At the level of the individual drug user, recognition of "internalized addictphobia" may help design appropriate behavioral interventions similar to the recognition of "internalized homophobia."

**LESSONS LEARNED:** The availability of a concept capturing the current social attitudes toward drug users may help understand and remedy the stigma and ostracism of drug user and improve HIV prevention measures.

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